

ARCH, 1943

NINEPENCE

THEATRE WORLD

This month : Supplement of "Arsenic and Old Lace"



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Edited by Frances Stephens

March,
1943

Over the
Footlights

A RECENT Brains Trust session dealt with the question of the lack of plays by English playwrights now running in the West End, where, it was pointed out, the theatre is largely given over to American productions, both straight and musical.

It cannot be said the august body gave a satisfactory answer as to why this should be; nor did they do justice to the English plays that are running, and running very successfully. By way of reminder we have included one or two pictures of some of them this month. *Quiet Week-End*, *Flare Path*, *Murder Without Crime*, *Men in Shadow*, and, of course, the war-time comedy record, *Blithe Spirit*, have all found a big public. On the musical side, Ivor Novello's phenomenal *The Dancing Years*, and in lighter vein, *Full Swing*, have never lacked enthusiastic audiences. Moreover, all these productions are excellent of their type.

ALL the same, the question was a pertinent one. There is a grave lack of English plays, especially of the more monumental kind, and there is a big invasion of lively American shows, a vast number of revivals, adaptations and translations from this and that language.

Indeed, J. B. Priestley's new play with its penetrating forward look, shines like a beacon in an arid desert.

May it not be that the stuff of good serious plays, the Shakespearean themes of love, jealousy, ambition, are now overlaid by the urgency of our national struggle for survival? It is not easy to delve into one human heart and soul when the whole of

humanity cries out for succour. And playwrights like Mr. Priestley who can take an idea or an ideal and clothe it for the stage, are not to be found around any corner.

AMERICA is still removed from this urgency. Until now she has been detached, and her geography will no doubt keep her comparatively so until the war is over. Over here we seem to be the pivot of this impersonal ideological struggle. All eyes are fixed on this small island, peopled as it is now with all nationalities, and the hopes of a dozen enslaved countries. It is a drama that overshadows all others, and one not to be encompassed on one stage, though perhaps after the attempt to dramatise Tolstoy's *War and Peace* there may arise a playwright who thinks differently.

But in one respect the English theatre is, I believe, in the ascendant. And that is in the realm of production and stagecraft. It is a remarkable fact that it should be so in war-time, but I dare swear that the playwrights of other countries are only too delighted to hear that their masterpieces are to be produced over here. Our revivals of the classics are almost always works of great beauty. Emlyn Williams's production of Turghenev's *A Month in the Country* is a case in point.

WE must, however, have more great plays from our own playwrights if the living English Theatre is to keep its soul and the English drama its identity.

F.S.

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P592A

New Shows of the Month

"Sleeping Out"

THIS new offering by Walter Ellis conforms to all the unwritten laws of English farce, which are guaranteed inevitably, it seems, to put English audiences into fits of laughter. There are the expected aggrieved wives, the irresistible secretary, the compromising bedroom. If there is a new note it is the background of early war trials, blackout, evacuation, and the rounding up of suspicious aliens.

Mr. Ellis is an old hand at the game, so the pace is slick and the dialogue amusing. Gene Gerrard and Gus McNaughton are the erring husbands, and Elizabeth Hunt the not-so-innocent secretary with the appealing foreign accent and a keen eye for business. Ellen Pollock and Buena Bent are righteously indignant as the flouted wives, and Douglas Stewart, Caven Watson and Gabrielle Daye (as the best Cockney servant we've seen for many a day) give lively support. It is a goodly cast who extract every ounce of fun from each and every farcical situation.

The play is directed by the author.

F.S.

"Androcles and the Lion"

IT is a great and rare thing for actors thoroughly to enjoy their own performance—and the "gift" lines the playwright so generously bestows, and at the same time to impart this enjoyment in full measure to their audience. You can see all the Arts Theatre group players having a whale of a time with Bernard Shaw's too-rarely produced play, from the moment when the lion (Lyn Evans) encounters Androcles (Denys Blakelock) and his tiresome wife Megaera (Josephine Middleton) on the jungle path, to the great showdown of bad men and good, outside the Coliseum arena doors, when motives are examined and self-deceptions thrown overboard, and a great mental and spiritual purification rounds off everything with unexpected satisfaction to all concerned; excepting, of course, the exhibitionist martyr (Wilfred Fletcher) who died untimely through taking the wrong turning.

Alec Clunes' robust and overpowering Christian Ferrovius, whose meekness and lovingkindness are standing no nonsense from anybody, dominates the Roman scene: the emperor's purple (Geoffrey Dunn wears it) is impotent against this uncompromising attitude, and the real and endearing mild-

King Lear—St. James's, Jan. 26th.

Twelfth Night—St. James's, Jan. 27th.

Sleeping Out—Piccadilly, Jan. 27th.

The Streets of London—Cambridge, Jan. 28th.

(Withdrawn Feb. 13th.)

Androcles and the Lion—Arts, Feb. 2nd.

A Little Bit of Fluff—Ambassadors, Feb. 4th.

She Stoops to Conquer—Mercury, Feb. 9th.

A Month in the Country—St. James's, Feb. 11th.

Old Chelsea—Princes, Feb. 17th.

ness of Androcles. Patricia Laffan's unyielding fanaticism as Lavinia is so well played as to awaken despair in the thoughtful. Maisie Meiklejohn's scenes are excellent.

Christians and Roman soldiers are played by students from Morley College and the Central School of Dramatic Art. The remainder of the cast is Derek Birch . . . Captain; Frank Partington and Gordon Davies (Roman courtiers); Morris Sweden (ox-driver); Peter Lindsay (call-boy); Michael Raghan (Editor of Gladiators); John Jowett (Gladiator); Roy Brundle, Robert Cartland, John Ingram and Charles Turner. Alec Clunes produces.

E.M.H.

"A Little Bit of Fluff"

THIS well-known farce was first presented during the last war, when it achieved a phenomenal success. For that very reason it might have been expected not to appeal in these days. Fashions in humour have changed in the last twenty-five years.

Yet, although very little revised—a few topical gags have been added—the play still has a big appeal, and the audiences at the Ambassadors find it much to their liking. A lot, of course, is due to the acting, and Henry Kendall and Olga Lindo are no mean exponents of the art of playing with aplomb and speed. The bit of fluff in this case is Chili Bouchier, with a load of charm to bring to the part, and Christopher Steele puts in an excellent bit of acting in support. Richard Afton, John Burch and Gilham are good in lesser parts.

Walter Ellis, the author, has achieved something of a distinction in having a last-war farce and a brand new this-war farce

(Continued overleaf)

running in the West End at one and the same time. F.S.

"A Month in the Country"

THIS play was written by Turghenev in 1850, ten years before Chekhov's birth, but not produced until 1872. The present production by Emlyn Williams (at the St. James's), with Elisaveta Fen's graceful and sensitive translation from the Russian, is a well-nigh flawless one. The Chekhovian blend of seemingly trivial incident and comment with involved and heartrending emotional experience on several planes, is beautifully and convincingly evolved. It would be easy enough to dismiss Natalia (Valerie Taylor) as a spoilt, self-dramatising and inconstant woman who, had she been of an epoch and a temperament to turn her leisure to good account, would have been content with the sober affection of a kind and stolid husband; easy enough to feel impatience at the analytical and *maniéré* type of flirtation she indulges in with Rakitin (Michael Redgrave), the philosophical and all-too-devoted family friend; easier still to suspect certain unreality in her infatuation for her son's new, unlicked tutor, Beliaer (Tom Gill). But Valerie Taylor, appealing in the lovely silks of a hundred years ago, irradiates in all these situations such intelligence, such restrained intensity, such quiet and despondent self-awareness, that one cannot but appreciate the tragic splendour of her almost comic vacillations. Her ward Vera (Isolde Denham) shows the cruder and more tempestuous reactions of young first love; and Beliaer, cause of all these upsets, is so much potter's clay.

The Doctor (Ronald Squire) who does not always say all he thinks about these wealthy and refined creatures (who dare not openly despise a peasant of his astringency and loquacity) provides much of the caustic comment. The impeccable Rakitin alone stems his eloquence. His qualified and uncomplimentary proposal of marriage to the companion Lizaveta (Winifred Hindle) is as amusing as the play's other utilitarian love scene between Katia (Jacqueline Clarke) and her desiccated wooer Matevi (Alban Blackelock). As for the *mariage de convenance* of Bolshintsov (John Ruddock) and Vera, we are left with the impression that there is really no need to deplore it, for it is, rather a device to round off a situation than a hard and fast and serious project. Michael Shepley plays the husband (Yslaev) of Natalia with the requisite degree of blindness. Annie Esmond, David Baxter and Frederick Schiller complete the cast. The settings are very charming; this is a *comédie de mœurs* with no message whatsoever, and as such a rare treat.

E.M.H.

"Old Chelsea"

IT was quite obvious from the moment Richard Tauber took the stage that the audience at the Princes asked nothing more than to hear their idol sing, and were not in the least critical of the intrinsic merits of the vehicle.

It is easy to fall under the spell of Tauber, and there are many enchanting numbers written by Tauber himself in this romance of Old Chelsea. But there are other numbers, one might say "hot" numbers, written for the most part by Bernard Grun, that strike a rather incongruous note, to say the least.

The settings and production are most colourful, but one felt a lot more might have been made of a romance set in 18th century Chelsea, that era of grace and artistry. Carol Lynne fulfils her early promise and gives a delightful performance and sings charmingly as Mary Fenton. Charles Hawtrey and Betty Percheron give piquant performances in the comedy roles, and Nancy Brown in the role of Nancy Gibbs, an Opera Singer, sings with good effect in an arduous part. F.S.

NOTHING could have demonstrated more certainly Donald Wolfitt's increased stature as one of our leading Shakespearean actors than his recent portrayal of Lear. It was a masterly performance, and probably his best piece of acting to date. Mr. Wolfitt conveyed with consummate skill the growing madness of the old King, and the tragedy that added years to the already aged shoulders. It was a pity the London season was so short.

The delightful C.E.M.A. production of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* by the Stanford Holme Company, has been followed at the Mercury Theatre by Eugene O'Neill's *Days Without End*, produced on Feb. 23rd, too late for review in this issue. Mary Newcomb, Andre van Gysegheem and John V. Trevor are in the cast.

The Logic of Sunday Theatres

(Continued from page 21)

places one expects the broad outlook, for our battle for political freedom surely began in our fight for religious tolerance. Nothing is more abhorrent than the suggestion implicit in these recent activities that religious compulsion of any kind should be brought to bear on the people. It seems to me also that our complicated modern civilisation is such that if these sticklers for 'Sunday Observance' were really consistent, their own lives, I fear, would be sadly affected.

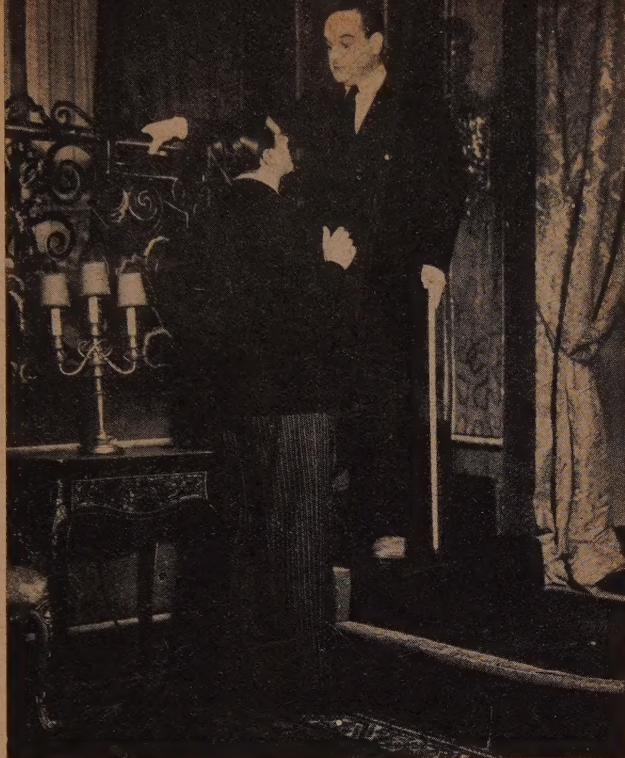
"Well, there it is," said Mr. Henson and I left him. "Members of Equity will have their chance to vote and it will be interesting to see the result."

"Murder Without Crime"

(Right): Peter Croft as Stephen and Walter Fitzgerald as Matthew in the successful psychological thriller now past its 300th performance at the Comedy Theatre. Mr. Fitzgerald recently scored a big hit as the Duke of Lamorre in *Duke in Darkness*.

"Men in Shadow"

(Below): John Mills as Lew and Alise Gachet as Cherie in a scene from *Men in Shadow*. Cherie is the only woman member of the cast: she is an elderly French peasant who at the imminent risk of her life helps the British airmen who have baled out over occupied France and have banded together in an underground movement to sabotage the Germans. Mary Hayley Bell's thrilling play is nearing its 250th performance at the Vaudeville.



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who has given a delightful performance as Maggie Cutler throughout the long run of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, which is now well past its 500th performance at the Savoy Theatre.

PORTRAIT BY JOHN VICKERS.

AS WE GO TO PRESS

FIRTH SHEPHARD is producing *Junior Miss*, the smash American hit still running in New York. The play comes to the Saville in the middle of March. Mr. Shephard is, of course, responsible for the two other big American comedy hits, *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the Strand, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* at the Savoy.

LESLIE HENSON and other players in *Fine and Dandy* are going out on tour under the auspices of the War Theatre Council, after this successful revue finishes its run at the Saville Theatre.

BARRIE'S famous comedy *What Every Woman Knows*, with Barbara Mullen as Maggie, is to be presented sometime in March in the West End by Jay Pomeroy. In this production, which is directed by Clifford Evans, Irene Vanbrugh will be seen as the Comtesse, Nicolas Hannen as Mr. Charles Venables and John Stuart as John Shand. The play opened a short provincial tour at the King's Theatre, Glasgow, on the 22nd of February.

JAY POMEROY and Prince Littler will present a season of popular concerts at the Stoll Theatre from March

8th for one month. The concerts, which will be daily, will be given by the London Symphony Orchestra (leader George Stratton) with leading conductors, including Sir Henry J. Wood, Dr. Malcolm Sargent, Sir Adrian Boult, Basil Cameron and Anatole Fistoulari. Amongst the prominent soloists so far booked to appear are Myra Hess, Moiseiwitch, Solomon, Pouishinoff and Albert Sammons.

LA-DI-DA-DA is the intriguing title of Lupino Lane's next Victoria Palace "offering"—on or about March 31st—after a week or two in the country. A farcical musical piece, it is by his late cousin Stanley Lupino, and the music is by Noël (Lambeth Walk) Gay. Pursuing his policy of "keeping the team together," he has engaged the principals who supported him in his recent revival of *Twenty to One*—Greta Fayne, Richard Dolman, Nita Harvey, Winnie Sloane, Wallace Lupino, Violet Blythe and William Norman; and newcomers are Leslie Weston and Noni and Partner. *Babes in the Wood* ended on February 27th.

A SPECIAL evening performance of Ivor Novello's *The Dancing Years* at the Adelphi Theatre on Monday, March 15th, will not only mark the first Adelphi anniversary of this great success, but assist the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund. On and off *The Dancing Years* has been before the public since the Spring of 1939.

ERIC PORTMAN, Martita Hunt, Beatrix Lehmann, and Eileen Peel are in the cast of H. M. Tennent Ltd.'s production of *Uncle Harry*, the American play, due shortly in the West End.

THIS year's Stratford Festival will be directed by Milton Rosmer, and the three guest producers are Dorothy Green, Balfour Holloway and Peter Cresswell.

EARLY in May Noel Coward will open a season at a West End theatre with his two plays *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter*.



Teddy: Personally I've always enjoyed my talks with Cardinal Gibbons—or have I met him yet?

Abby Brewster (Lilian Braithwaite) entertains her neighbour, The Rev. Dr. Harper (Clarence Bigge) to tea. *Left*, Frank Pettingell as Teddy Brewster, whose mental derangement takes the form of imagining himself to be Theodore Roosevelt.

(Right):

Martha: Teddy, dear, put it back.

Teddy: But the Oregon goes to Australia.

Abby and Martha Brewster (Mary Jerrold) humour Teddy with kindly understanding, while Officer Brophy (George Dillon, *left*) and Officer Klein (E. J. Kennedy), friendly members of the local police, lend a hand.



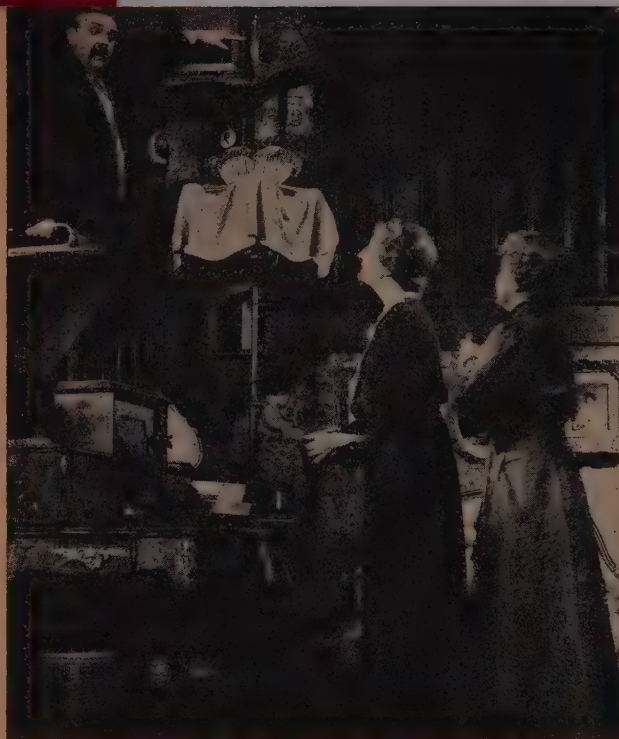
“Arsenic and Old Lace”

THE irresistible appeal of Joseph Kesselring's comedy is not easy to assess in cold blood. There is so much more to it than the story of a couple of kindly but mad, old ladies and their all-unsuspecting victims; so much more than a score or so of fantastically funny situations, the like of which the London stage has probably never seen before. For Mr. Kesselring, while rocking us with laughter, manages to slip in some goodly satire en route, and some healthy jibes at many an institution from respectability to dramatic critics.

He might indeed have extended the idea to the international field and further demonstrated how slender is the thread between sanity and insanity. But we are quite content with the more modest confines of the Brewster home and all that happens therein.

We would not alter by one jot the English interpretation of the play. Marcel Varnel's production is flawless and the acting of the company, particularly of Lilian Braithwaite and Mary Jerrold, is one of the big reasons why *Arsenic and Old Lace* is the greatest comedy hit in years.

SCENES and FRONT COVER STUDY by JOHN VICKERS



(Left):

Teddy: Charge, charge the blockho

One of "President Teddy Roosevelt's" favourite activities is storm the staircase, bugle in hand. Another is to blow the bugle at odd hours of the day and night, a little habit not too pleasing to his neighbours. Hence the frequent visits from the police, who, however, always find a friendly welcome at the wealthy Brewster home, particularly from Abby and Martha, who are real lavender ladies with a big reputation for good works throughout the town.

In fact, their nephew, Mortimer, whose profession of dramatic criticism scarcely seems proper in the midst of so much virtue, and the Rev. Dr. Harper is not a little concerned that his daughter Elaine has grown so friendly with the young man, and through him has become "addicted" to the theatre.



(Above):

Elaine: It's wonderful to go to the theatre almost every night of my life.

Martha: Well, if Mortimer has to see some of those plays he has to see, at least he is sitting next to a minister's daughter.

(Eileen Bennett as Elaine Harper.)

(Right):

Mortimer: For a minister's daughter you know a lot about life. Where'd you learn it?

Elaine: In the choir loft.

Mortimer Brewster (Naughton Wayne) proposes to Elaine and is accepted.



Abby: Well, his name's Hoskins, Adam Hoskins. That's really all I know about him—except he's a Methodist.

Imagine Mortimer's horror when quite by chance he discovers a body in the window box. And imagine his astonishment when he learns from Abby and Martha that they have a habit of poisoning harmless gentlemen who call to enquire after a room they have to let. In the most matter of fact tones they explain that this is a great act of kindness to the lonely, and that no less than twelve have already fallen into the trap. It is all very simple, for Martha has a knack with poisoned cocktails. It clawns' on the distraught Mortimer that his charming old aunts have, like Teddy, inherited the Brewster madness. Nor does it help his peace of mind to learn that the bodies are buried in the cellar with great reverence according to the rites of their several religious denominations.



(Right):

Mortimer: Get out of here. Do you want to be poisoned?

Mortimer, feeling he must do something about his terrible discovery—but what he doesn't quite know—puts in a frantic call to his office to arrange for someone else to review the play he was taking Elaine to that night. While he is 'phoning, one, Mr. Gibbs, a potential thirteenth victim (Fred Beck), calls in response to the furnished room advertisement, and is saved by Mortimer just in the nick of time, much to the old ladies' pained annoyance. Being Brewster, Mortimer now feels he cannot contemplate marriage with Elaine, but refuses to give a reason, and the young lady is naturally puzzled by this turn of events.





Jonathan: Come in Dr. Einstein. This is the home of my youth.

Mortimer has rushed out, having made his aunts promise not to open the door to anyone. Soon after, however, there arrives unexpectedly Jonathan Brewster, Mortimer's brother, and black sheep of the family, missing these many years. Abby and Martha fail to recognise him, for his friend, Dr. Einstein, when under the influence of drink, has lifted Jonathan's face to the likeness of Boris Karloff. (Martin Miller as Dr. Einstein and Edmund Willard as Jonathan.)



(Left):

Jonathan: I see you are still wearing the lovely garnet ring that Grandma Brewster bought in England.

(Below):

Einstein: They know you, Chonny. You know your own brother. Speak to him.

Abby and Martha at last realise this is really Jonathan and are none too pleased at his reappearance, especially as he obviously intends to stay.





Jonathan: We're bringing—the luggage through here.

The funny thing is that Jonathan has a body to dispose of—a certain Mr. Spenalzo—whose car he and the doctor have appropriated. But Abby and Martha don't know about that, nor does Jonathan even suspect the presence of the body in the window box. Jonathan's comings and goings are very inconvenient this night of all nights—the occasion of Mr. Hoskins' funeral.

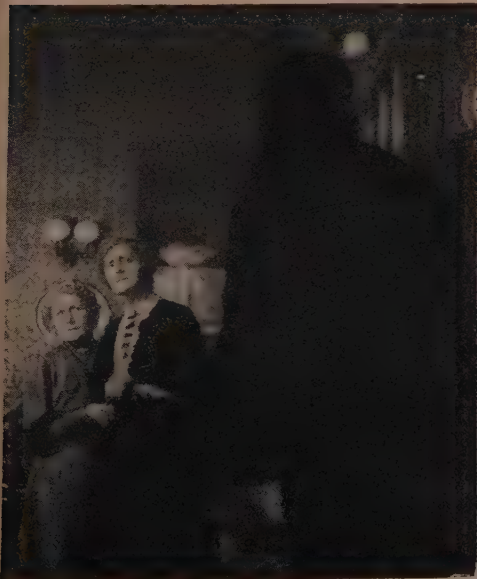
(Below):

Jonathan: Aunt Martha, did you hear me say go to bed.

(Below):

Teddy, believing Mr. Hoskins to be yet another Panama Canal yellow fever victim, obligingly carries the body down into the cellar to await the funeral service.

Jonathan's mood becomes decidedly ugly.





Jonathan: I'll take a look around outside the house. When I tap on the glass, you open the window.

Jonathan and Einstein creep downstairs later that night, hoping Abby and Martha are firmly asleep.



Einstein: Wait — wait a minute. You lost a leg somewhere.

With some difficulty the body of Mr. Spenalzo is safely deposited in the window box; lately vacated by the corpse of Mr. Hoskins.



Teddy: Oh no, it's going to be a private funeral.

A nerve-racking moment for Elaine who has come back to try and elucidate Mortimer's recent strange behaviour, and is met by a suspicious Jonathan, and by Teddy in full tropical kit, who talks about his "yellow fever" victims buried in the cellar, which is the Panama Canal to his deranged mind.

Abby and Martha: What's the matter? What's happening down there?

Dressed in the deepest mourning Abby and Martha step forth for the solemn occasion of the funeral of Mr. Hoskins. However, this ceremonial—always the highlight in these affairs—is rudely interrupted by the presence of Jonathan, now a more than menacing figure.



Mortimer: I know this isn't a nightmare. But what is it?

Mortimer, with a plan in his mind, returns just in time to rescue Elaine from the cellar. Naturally enough he is astonished at the presence of the unrecognisable Jonathan, and his odd companion, Dr. Einstein.



Abby: Who can that be?

Mortimer, expecting to find Mr. Hoskins still in the window box, is further horrified when he finds a new and strange corpse. But Abby, with dignity, disclaims all knowledge of this stranger, whose presence, indeed, she greatly resents.

(Right):

Jonathan: Are you still giving me orders after seeing what happened to Mr. Spenalzo?

A battle of wits now ensues between Mortimer and the dangerous Jonathan, who already knows too much. Jonathan has been true to the Brewster tradition we find and has committed a dozen murders in various parts of the world.



(Left):

Abby: Jonathan you might as well stop what you are doing.

Jonathan: It's all done.

With Mr. Spenalzo safely in the cellar Jonathan's troubles look like being over.

Mortimer: Don't blow the bugle, Mr. President.

Teddy: I have to call a cabinet meeting.

Mortimer, in order to save his aunts, hits upon the idea of getting Teddy into a mental home, where he could with impunity be attributed with the corpses, out of reach of the law. He gets Teddy to sign the necessary papers by pretending he has an important proclamation for the "President."



Mortimer: Things are going to start popping around here any minute now.

Dr. Einstein, knowing Jonathan to be in a murderous mood, tries to warn Mortimer, but in vain. The young man refuses to listen and later sure enough finds himself bound and gagged and at the mercy of the mad Jonathan.



O'Hara: Now you've got to hear the plot.

The providential arrival of Officer O'Hara, who fancies himself as a budding playwright, proves not so happy for Mortimer, for at last the former finds the ideal opportunity of imparting the plot of his play without interruption. (Cyril Smith as O'Hara.)



O'Hara: . . . The Chink is standing over her with a hatchet. . . .

Several hours later, and O'Hara hasn't finished. Jonathan meantime has fallen asleep while the unfortunate Mortimer still remains gagged and bound and helpless against the torrent of words.



Officers Brophy and Klein arrive, and when the latter remarks on Jonathan's likeness to Boris Karloff he is seized unceremoniously by the throat.



O'Hara: Can I come over sometime and use the station typewriter?

O'Hara is nothing daunted when Lieutenant Rooney (Frank Tilton) discovers how he has been spending the night, and immediately suspends him from the police force.



Lieut. Mooney: Who are you?

Teddy: I'm President Roosevelt.

The Lieutenant begins to find it difficult to get his bearings in the Brewster household. - Meantime Jonathan, finally overcome, is recognised as a world murderer wanted by the police.

(Right):

Abby: Oh, you wouldn't have to dig here. The graves are all marked. We put flowers on them every Sunday.

There are some ugly moments when Abby, Martha and even Teddy discuss the thirteen bodies buried in the cellar. But the police are quite unmoved, refusing to believe there could be anything sinister about the much respected Brewster household, even if the harmless Teddy does sometimes annoy neighbours playing the bugle.



(Left):

Mortimer: Aren't you going to wait for Jonathan?

Einstein: I don't think we are going to the same place.

Mortimer at last sees a happy solution to his problem. Abby and Martha have refused to part from Teddy, but are only too happy to go and look after him at the Happy Dale Sanatorium. Mr. Witherspoon, the Superintendent, arrives to make the arrangements, and Dr. Einstein most gladly signs the papers before making his getaway.

(Wilfred Caithness as Mr. Witherspoon.)





Jonathan: The score stands even, twelve to twelve.

Jonathan, being removed by the police, flings a last jibe at his aunts, and indeed it looks as though the mad Brewsters will have no more chances of adding to their dark deeds. Most happily for Mortimer, his aunts, as a kind of afterthought, tell him that he is in fact not a Brewster at all, though brought up with the family. So Mortimer's romance with Elaine can have a happy ending after all. There is an air of peace prevailing when Martha and Abby, left alone with Mr. Witherspoon for a few minutes, offer him a friendly glass.



Witherspoon: We don't see much elderberry wine nowadays. I thought I had had my last glass of it.

Abby: Oh no.

Martha: No. Here it is!

The closing moments of the play!

The Logic of Sunday Theatres

LESLIE HENSON, like most people with a highly developed sense of humour, has a clear and unbiased outlook on life and a reasoned tolerance of the kind sorely needed in this disintegrating world of ours.

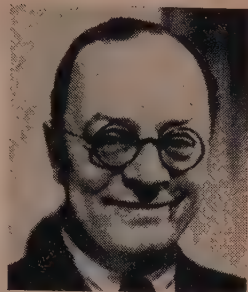
His case for the opening of theatres on Sundays therefore commands respect and a prominent place in the pages of *Theatre World*; though we believe that our readers need no conversion to his point of view, having long seen the logic and the justice of demanding the repeal of an out-of-date and more than ridiculous law.

Mr. Henson re-stated his case for me once again in the Saville Theatre, but this time in his dressing room, just before the evening performance of *Fine and Dandy*, where the smell of grease paint and the voice of the call boy gave greater reality to the manifest reasonableness and sincerity of his outlook on this question.

"First of all," said Mr. Henson, "it seems incredible to me that the opposition should have insisted that Sunday theatres would mean a seven-day week. Why should they suppose that in the England of 1943 our industry more than any other would go unprotected in this respect? Indeed, so strong are my own views on the subject that I will not personally appear in any show for more than eight performances a week—I would start a poultry farm rather than do it," he added with the familiar Henson grin. "The nine performances asked of most actors and actresses as a war-time expediency are too many in my opinion, while the twice daily performances of big musicals which are becoming the fashion impose a strain on stars and company out of all reason. I suppose, however, I ought to add that with my regular Sunday concerts to the troops I am in effect doing a seven-day week, and that is what would be the outcome of purely charity performances on Sundays which some of the opposition are willing to concede—inevitably a seven-day week.

"Now I am not convinced," continued Mr. Henson, "that our war workers and the services want 'charity' in the way of Sunday performances. But I do believe they want Sunday theatres for the simple reason that with performances at 5.30 or 6 p.m. they cannot get to a show except on Saturdays when the theatres are always packed to the doors. And it would surely

LESLIE HENSON TALKS TO THE EDITOR



be in the interests of the industry—managements and actors alike—to play to say £800 on each of two good nights a week, *i.e.*, Saturdays and Sundays, instead of say £1,700 for the whole week on the present arrangement. In that way many a worthy and artistic production might be saved from early demise. It should be pointed out, too, apropos 'non-commercial' Sunday openings, that it costs in the neighbourhood of £150 just to open a theatre in essential running costs, and I might add in answer to the many jibes against commercial theatres that probably 70 per cent. of the money changing hands within any theatre, through the box office and by way of salaries, goes back to the Exchequer in the form of entertainment tax and income tax.

It would, of course, be folly to say that Sunday theatres are certain to prove popular—the public have never had a chance of expressing their views on the subject—but we can only find out by trying, and after three months I feel convinced we should know."

Mr. Henson's thoughts are very much in the provinces as far as this problem is concerned, where even in these days theatrical activities must represent 90 per cent. of the whole. His conviction that the ideal arrangement would be for touring companies to travel on Fridays and open to the usual enthusiastic and full Saturday audiences seems a sound one. "Nothing is more dispiriting—even for the greatest actor on earth—than to follow Sunday travelling—usually more or less foodless—with a performance to the customary dead Monday night house," said Mr. Henson.

"I have said nothing about the Sabbatarian attitude in all this," he added, "because my own religious views are quite personal to myself. But in England of all

(Continued on page 6)

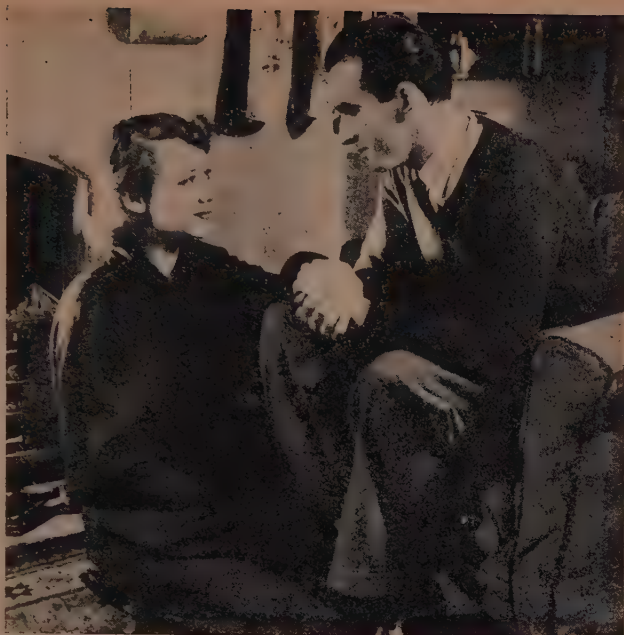


Scenes from "Quiet Week-End" at Wyndham

(Left):
 George Thorpe and Mar-
 garet Fielding as Mr. and
 Mrs. Royd, in Esther
 Cracken's "marathon"
 comedy, one of the biggest
 successes of recent years.
 The appeal of *Quiet
 Week-End* undoubtedly
 lies in the nostalgic charm
 of its pre-war setting—the
 friends' week-end country
 cottage—and the delight-
 ful characters who people
 the play.

(Right):

Glynis Johns as Miranda
 Bute and Geoffrey
 Edwards as Denys Royd
 in a love scene. Glynis
 in her sensitively por-
 trayed love scene. Glynis
 Johns gives a lovely per-
 formance as a young girl
 in the throes of her first
 adolescent love affair.



(Left):
 Miranda resents the pre-
 sence of Rowena (Jeanne
 Kent), sophisticated
 friend of Denys, who
 exerts a disruptive influ-
 ence during this memor-
 able week-end.

(Right):

Frank Cellier appears as
 a respected J.P. and
 friend of the Royds, who
 much to his own amaze-
 ment is inveigled into a
 spot of salmon poaching
 by Mr. Royd; a disastrous
 escapade greatly enjoyed
 by Miranda.



*Pictures by
 Swarbrick Studios.*

on's brilliant Comedy success, presented by Linnit and Dunfee, is now
 nearing its 700th performance.

Whispers from the Wings

BY
LOOKER ON



CICELY COURTNEIDGE

Harlip.

HAVING tea with Cicely Courtneidge between acts at the Palace Theatre is a stimulating affair. Not only are you likely to meet all the stars of the show—they pop in and out with the greatest informality for a welcome “breather” over tea and cakes—but Miss Courtneidge herself positively radiates good cheer and friendliness, and one would be shy indeed not to feel immediately at home in her presence.

On or off the stage Miss Courtneidge's vitality is astonishing; one just basks in the glow of her scintillating personality and feels the better for it. She is one of those rare people whose springs of energy seem inexhaustible and who therefore accomplish superhuman things in life. Anyway that's what I thought when I looked in for tea during a matinée recently. Chatting gaily away to half-a-dozen visitors, including Keneth Kent, Gabrielle Brune, Nora Swinburne, and of course her husband, Jack

Hulbert, Miss Courtneidge seemed superbly oblivious of the strenuous last act that lay ahead, and is it strenuous!

The great thing about matinée performances of *Full Swing* at the Palace is that they should run to time, for at curtain fall Miss Courtneidge makes her appeal for that excellent war charity—her Ack-Ack Comforts Fund. At the best of times in these days the pause between afternoon and evening performance is short enough in all conscience; for Cicely Courtneidge it is nearly a non-stop performance. But does she mind! Not on your life! That fund of hers has brought endless pleasure to the men manning our anti-aircraft and searchlight posts in countless lonely, isolated spots. In money alone Miss Courtneidge has, I believe, collected well over £8,000, apart from innumerable gifts in kind—wireless sets, gramophones, records, books, etc., etc.

How is it done? I thought I would see. Miss Courtneidge dashed down to the stage for the last act, and I, after finishing my cup of tea in leisure and having a little chat with Miss Courtneidge's dresser, sauntered in at the back of the house. There was Cicely, resplendent in black velvet and diamonds, doing her “vamping” act, with husband Jack Hulbert hovering nearby heavily disguised as a waiter, still in pursuit of that blue envelope, the tell-tale dossier of villain Keneth Kent. What good English fun it all is! I laughed myself to tears—for the third time of seeing the show—and wished I hadn't missed the first two acts.

Then after the final line-up, out came Miss Courtneidge before the curtain to make her appeal. And very charming she looked in her white evening gown and the mink coat that figures so largely in the plot. And what a graceful little speech she made. And then, in the middle of it, could I believe my ears—yes the siren! No siren ever blew at a more opportune moment, or to such good effect, I warrant! Miss Courtneidge seized the opportunity with both hands so to speak, tore off the famous mink coat, and really got down to it.

Later as we filed out, there was Miss Courtneidge in the vestibule with a smile for everyone as we dropped our gifts into the officer's hat she keeps for the purpose.

I haven't enquired yet, but the amount collected that afternoon should have been a record one.

Sadler's Wells Ballet—THE RECENT SEASON

Reviewed by Audrey Williamson

MARGOT FONTEYN'S London début as Swanhilda in *Coppelia* was the event of the short Sadler's Wells Ballet season at the New; it gave a glitter of excitement to the first night and put this 60-year-old classical ballet into a "star" place in the repertoire it has not held since Adeline Genée danced it at the old Empire. *Coppelia* is one of the most charming of the doll ballets. It has neither the compact artistry nor the satiric sense of character of *Boutique Fantasque*, and the choreography lacks that touch of sensibility that makes the pas-de-deux of Massine's Can-Can Dancers suddenly moving. But it has fun and verve, a delicious score, and a part for the ballerina which is technically one of the most exacting in all ballet. Margot Fonteyn tackled it with a speed and lightness that are remarkable when one considers how much she has been overworked of late, and the fact that her point-work has an acquired rather than a natural hardness. Her second act arabesque is lovely, and her gaiety and mimic invention show how much her range has widened. The performance has the sparkle of champagne, and if high spirits, rather than actual mischief, are the key, why not? No part, from Hamlet downwards, can be nailed down to one interpretation, and the great artist will give to all rôles a touch of individuality. Fonteyn's Swanhilda is not like Mary Honer's, but neither, one suspects, was Mary Honer's like that of Lopokova or Genée or Ninette de Valois.

No Set Tradition

The same controversy crops up over Robert Helpmann's Dr. Coppélius, a part one has been told in all seriousness "was not meant to be funny." The truth is there is no set tradition attached to this part at all; it has been played on the continent in twenty different ways, from an elegant aristocrat in powdered wig to a comic butt. Helpmann plays it with a brilliant sense of caricature and comic invention, together with that touch of pathos—in the old man's breathless awed delight when the doll comes to life, his grief when he realises the trick—that one finds in the work of all great clowns. He is very funny; the ballet is in any case a comedy, and anyone who talks of the "artistic integrity" of playing such a part seriously is talking artistic tosh.

Frederick Ashton Revivals

Frederick Ashton's ballets, *The Wise Virgins* and *Apparitions*, were both revived



Antony.

MARGOT FONTEYN

as she appears in *Apparitions*.

this season. *The Wise Virgins*, with its lovely serene Bach score and Hebraic beauty of grouping, pivots on Margot Fonteyn's Bride, which has a fresco-like innocence and grace. Joan Sheldon's Foolish Virgin is amusingly frivolous, but just a little too conscious of the joke; this clever little dancer has not yet learned how to empty her head of brains. Alexis Rassiné is now given the ungrateful part of the Bridegroom, though heavens knows what the poor boy has done to deserve it, or a wig that sets one's mind wandering after clay pipes and bubbles. The unholy young men of this ballet, in fact, never quite come off, and one is always slightly shocked to discover, at the end, that the virgins have apparently "clicked" with the angels.

Apparitions was the more exciting revival, and it is a pity only three performances were given, by which time a certain raggedness in the corps was beginning to disappear. This superb romantic ballet

Sadler's Wells Ballet (continued)

retains after six years its power to move and its crescendo of mounting excitement. The beautiful gradation of colour in Cecil Beaton's costumes, and Constant Lambert's fine arrangement of Liszt's music, combine with the richness and invention of the choreography to suggest an atmosphere at once vivid and yet touched with the sinister imprint of a dream. This emphasis on the unreal is helped by Robert Helpmann's acting, especially in the magnificent Ball Scene when he seems to move in another dimension, with the dancers and yet not of them. Helpmann dances this exhausting part with fire and passionate sincerity, and Margot Fonteyn beautifully realises the dream-like fascination, half-capricious, half-tender, of the woman. But why cover her face with a mask in the macabre Red Monk scene, when the Woman takes on a distorted quality of evil? The force of this whole scene depends on the Poet's recognition, in this depraved creature, of the Woman in the Ball Dress, and the shock is weakened if the face is not recognisably the same. Noverre, two centuries ago, cried "Let us destroy masks and gain a soul," and Fonteyn is now a mature enough actress to be allowed to express the change by her play of expression.

Margot Fonteyn

Margot Fonteyn has now danced all of the five great classical rôles, and that she possesses the qualities that distinguish the artist from the mere technician is apparent in her Swan Queen, to which she gives a lyrical softness and pathos without impairing her dignity or the cool purity and extension of her classical "line." Her mime in the second act is exquisite, and she has a kind of moonlit radiance that transforms the drab décor and gives an unearthly beauty to a movement recently revived from the original pas-de-deux—when the two lovers swing sadly together, their arms spread out like wings, so that for an instant Helpmann's Prince seems touched with her bird-like quality. In *Giselle* she draws a remarkable portrait, charming, gay, but dangerously highly-strung, in which the Mad Scene is delicately but logically prepared for. There are beautiful touches—her timid fingering of the Princess's silk gown, wide-eyed with delight, the way her eyes search Loy's face for reassurance and her love for him which one feels even in the wraith of the second act, with its protective pity and tender last gesture, her hand sliding down his cheek as he lowers her into the grave. The Mad Scene is moving because it shows a mind with glimmerings of lucidity; the same quality makes her Ophelia touching, and I have seen no stage actress suggest so sensitively the pitiful impotency of the character,

too easily afraid, loving but helpless to understand Hamlet's suffering and need. In one gesture, a timid caress not quite daring to touch Hamlet's hair, she expresses Ophelia's whole tragedy. Fonteyn's brilliance as a dancer has tended to blind people to her acting (the converse is true of Helpmann). The only part of which she has not yet quite got the measure is the Girl in *Rake*, where she unbalances the satiric first scene by making us too conscious of the Girl's tragedy. Her later scenes are rightly moving and the part is beautifully danced, except curiously, in the embroidery dance, where her fingers tightly clenched over the needle destroy the delicate grace of the hand movements.

John Field for the Forces

The last few seasons have seen a heartening blossoming of young talent, which I think deserves an article to itself next month. But a word is due now to John Field, who was called up at the end of this season. Technically he was a dancer of exceptional promise, capable of clean double turns and with a good "line" and *batterie*. Though a little reserved and needing encouragement, he had the lyricism for *Sylphides* and *The Wanderer pas-de-deux*, and he played Laertes with a dramatic expressiveness for which his extremely intelligent and sensitive mime as Wilfred in *Giselle* had prepared us. His going weakens the male company not a little.

The Salvage Drive—

KEEP UP YOUR PERFORMANCES

EVEN at the five hundredth or one thousandth performance of a show we expect good acting from the cast.

We all have a big part to play in the present world struggle for freedom, and no less must we keep our performance up to standard day by day. It is one thing to make a good showing in the first flush of enthusiasm: quite another to keep it going when the element of drudgery sets in.

Once again there is need for an extra effort in the collection of salvage—particularly paper. Don't get slack. There is a growing need for every scrap of waste.

Make it a daily duty to collect your quota. See that the "curtain rises" on your effort regularly and that there are no slack performances! Apart from the home, there is much to be done at your office or other place of business.

One day the curtain will fall on the last night of this grim world drama, and we shall all be the better pleased if our effort was consistently good throughout.



Paul Tanqueray.

MARY HINTON who gives such a sensitive and understanding portrayal as Mrs. Brown in *Claudia*, the great success, which has passed its 200th performance at the St. Martins.



HERMIONE BADDELEY returns to the legitimate stage as Ida Arnold in *Brighton Rock*, the dramatisation of Graham Greene's best selling novel, which comes to the Garrick Theatre this month.



John Vickers.

DOROTHY BATLEY, whose amusing performance as Ella Spender, the loquacious village busy-body, is one of the reasons for the phenomenal success of *Quiet Week-End* at Wyndhams Theatre.



Janet Jevons.

JANE CARR has scored an outstanding hit as Countess Wanda in *Waltz Without End*, in which she sang so delightfully at the Lyric. The play opens a tour at Bristol on March 1st.



Portrait by Vandamm.

KATHARINE CORNELL

The First Lady of the American Theatre, as she appears as "Masha" in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, her thirteenth production as actress-manager, now running at the Barrymore Theatre on Broadway.

Playing in Motley designed sets, surrounded by a matchless cast of unrivalled brilliance, boasting such famous names as Judith Anderson, Ruth Gordon, Gertrude Musgrove, Edmund Gwenn, and Dennis King, Miss Cornell has broken even American box office records by netting 125,000 dollars during the first five weeks of the run.

No one was louder in praise than Mrs. Roosevelt, one of America's keenest playgoers, who declared in her daily column that *The Three Sisters*, directed by Guthrie McClintic, was "a very remarkable production."

During a short try-out tour of this masterpiece Miss Cornell staged the entire play at an American Army Camp between Baltimore and Philadelphia in crude but effective sets designed by the soldiers themselves. The great actress was so moved by their tempestuous reception that she broke all precedents and made the first curtain speech of her distinguished career.

(Our American Correspondent's feature "Echoes from Broadway" we regret to say has not arrived in time for inclusion this month. Mr. Mawby Green is, however, we understand, dealing fully with Katharine Cornell's distinguished production of "The Three Sisters," and his review will accordingly appear in the April issue.—EDITOR.)

Theatrical Brains, Trust at the Intimate, Palmers Green

THE success of the film which Donald Taylor and Howard Thomas have made of the B.B.C. Brains Trust inspired Intimate Theatre producer Ronald Kerr to exploit the drawing power of screen and stage actors. He arranged with the Intimate Playgoers' Club to hold a new kind of Brains Trust—a "Theatrical Brains Trust" at the Intimate Theatre on Sunday, January 31st. In addition to Kerr himself the "Trust" consisted of famous stage actor and producer Lewis Casson, film star Eric Portman, enjoying an afternoon's relaxation from strenuous filming at Denham, theatre critic Peter Noble, Margaret Yarde, fresh from her role of Ma Grisson in *No Orchids* for Miss Blandish, and S. L. Salzedo.

Questions from the Playgoers' Club dealt with every aspect of the theatre and were answered intelligently and often amusingly by the "Trust." Portman and Casson both had great personal successes and Ronald Kerr intends to find time (from his teaching at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and his work as a full-time air-raid warden) to arrange a series of bumper "Theatrical

Brains Trusts" consisting of many of the great names of the theatre.

If the screen-appeal of Joad and Campbell in the Brains Trust film is any criterion there is a film idea here. Maybe soon we shall be seeing film and stage stars as quiz experts in their off-duty time? In fact actors and actresses make excellent "Brains Trusters." They have the presence and the clear diction for the job, and it must be said, too, they have on the whole the broad outlook and lucidity of thought often strangely lacking in other professions. All this is a reminder that actress Margaret Rawlings recently joined the newly-formed *Daily Express* Brains Trust. The idea is spreading.

"Wild Rose"

A limited number of special souvenirs featuring "Wild Rose," recently at the Princes, with Jessie Matthews and Richard Hearne starring, are now available and can be obtained from Theatre World Offices, price 6d.

Bohemian Minority

by

Eric Johns.



"**L**IVE and Let Live" is being screamed at the Dictators every day of their lives, yet no one would be more astonished than the Great British Public if a popular actor suddenly levelled that same well worn cliché against one of their "men in the street." There would be ample justification for such a turning of the tables, since particularly outside the big towns there are still thousands of people who consider stage folk not quite nice to know.

One of this horde is Mr. Tomkins, living in the Garden City, where for twenty years he has been chained to a slut of a wife who does little more than darn his socks with badly matched wool and cook his food with badly acquired skill.

A bookkeeper in a dreary iron foundry, Mr. Tomkins has been a regular passenger on the eight-thirty bus every morning since the last war, when his imagination fell into decay and he allowed himself to deteriorate into an automaton devoted to earning money for the sole purpose of supporting his wife; paying for his house; and taking the children to Margate for a fortnight every August.

He Dictates Public Opinion

Unfortunately Mr. Tomkins is one of the Dictators of Public Opinion, and because an actress prefers to live a free life that appeals to her, instead of enduring his cribbed suburban existence, he chooses to brand her as a figure of easy virtue and delights in causing her to be dragged into the lime-light to wash her dirty linen. While affecting to deplore the star's favours, it seems his moral outlook decidedly savours of sour grapes. Consumed with envy, he only wishes he had possessed her courage in his youth and had followed the dictates of his heart instead of allowing himself to become engulfed by overpowering respectability. Whereas the opinion of the neighbours means nothing to the actress, Mr. Tomkins' whole life is directed and enslaved by it, and he can never forgive himself for having failed to attain real happiness, and in consequence resents others who have been clever enough to organise their lives to better advantage.

The acting profession is no more immoral than any other, though certain isolated artists who have never caused any other human soul an hour's suffering, have from time to time been pilloried by Mr. Tomkins and his set, merely because they chose to share their lives with those who fire their imagination and satisfy their longing for happiness. Mr. Tomkins has an ugly phrase for such an existence; he calls it "living in sin."

He should be dragged to a production of Noel Coward's *Design for Living*, where he will find Otto and Gilda "living in sin" and will hear Otto say: "We're not doing any harm to anyone else. We're not peppering the world with illegitimate children. The only people we could possibly mess up are ourselves and that's our lookout." In other words, Mr. Tomkins would find Otto politely telling him to mind his own business.

Artists need courage to lead so unconventional an existence and should be admired for having sufficient faith in their convictions to follow them to their logical conclusion. It needs courage to be a genuine Conscientious Objector; people sling mud at them, accusing them of choosing an easy way of evading military service, but men who are sincere C.O.s and can withstand the lashes of social ostracism because they feel they are doing the right thing are surely martyrs to a cause. Similarly the artist who maps out his private life and pursues the course unflinchingly, regardless of public opinion, is to be respected.

The Guiding Motive

The little pasteboard world of the theatre could so easily set an example to the great world at large, for "Live and Let Live" is the guiding motive of all who live and work for the stage. The majority of artists are "respectable" citizens, but Bohemians do exist, and in their world of stage doors and green rooms they are neither treated as black sheep, nor ostracised as undesirables.

The Bohemian is judged solely as an actor, a producer, or a playwright. The "respectable" ones never dream of prying

(Continued overleaf)

into his private life, which they regard as a sacred part of his existence. The "women" in his life are no concern of theirs; they admire and respect him as a colleague and would never have the indelicacy to trespass into his off-stage life. They never tolerate libertines merely posing as artists in the theatre; such imposters soon find their level and are slung into the street; but anyone who has sufficient talent to merit description as an artist is treated as such and takes his place in the hierarchy accordingly.

The Tolerant Outlook

Managers—the employers of artists—display the same tolerant outlook. They don't cold-shoulder any Bohemian who gives them value for the cheque they hand over to him. If he writes plays that run a year; if he has a profile that draws the town; or if he designs costumes that cause women to gasp with wonder—then they don't think twice about employing him. They pay him handsomely for his play, his profile, or his designs, and what he does with the rest of his time is no concern of theirs, nor would they dream of allowing it to influence their decision when considering his engagement for a new production. They have the sense to realise that a man who is really happy in his private life will be more likely to work well and give them the best possible return for their money.

No artist is penalised by his colleagues on account of his private life, no matter how unorthodox it might be. Isadora Duncan wasn't, though her lovers were legion, and she wrote in her autobiography: "I was against marriage with every intelligent force of my being . . . and believe it to be an absurd and enslaving institution, leading—especially with artists—inevitably to the divorce courts and preposterous and vulgar lawsuits."

Mr. Tomkins considers artists should be ashamed of themselves, but if he lived at close quarters with stage people he would realise that in the artificial hot-house atmosphere in which their profession compels them to live, marriage between artists becomes a very difficult business, and perhaps marriage between an artist and an outsider is an even more difficult problem. There was a good deal in Isadora's creed which was not simply an excuse for loose living. Speaking of unmarried artists

setting up home together in Paris, Ibsen said: "Never have I heard one objectionable word there, still less have I ever seen anything that I could call immoral." Even Mr. Tomkins has to admit that Ibsen is no facetious scribbler, and still has considerable influence on contemporary thought.

Poor Mrs. Tomkins has let her personality slide, together with her figure and her looks. She simply reflects her husband's drab attitude to life. Her mediocre ideas on politics are crystallised in an uninspired collection of quotations, repeated parrot-fashion from her husband's running commentary on the headlines of the morning paper, always propped up against the cut glass sugar bowl—Auntie Annie's hideous wedding present. She likes pork, but always serves beef because Mr. T. has no taste for the delicacies of the swine. She has long given up her passion for dancing because Mr. T. is too tired for anything in the evening except to sit by the fire with his crossword while she knits sagging jumpers and shapeless gloves.

No artist could exist for a week in so soul-destroying an atmosphere. It would annihilate her personality, the very life-blood of her temperament, which she cultivates so zealously. She would be false to herself if she chose to live on soil which failed to nourish it, for life would lose all meaning, leaving her desolate in spirit and penniless in pocket.

Their Art Comes First

Artists have their individual standard of morality and decency. Their work comes first; their career is all-important; the rest of their life takes second place, having to be fitted into an harmonious pattern about their precious career, which must in no way be injured by the design of their private life.

Mr. Tomkins should acquire the habit of judging these puppets of the theatre solely as artists; their life behind the curtain is no concern of his; they perform without question before white men or negroes; saints or sinners; great figures of our time or the scum of the earth. They enjoy playing to each and all of those members of their audiences because they are good playgoers; Mr. Tomkins should acknowledge the gesture by applauding them as artists and refusing to allow his knowledge of their private lives to prejudice his reaction to their work.

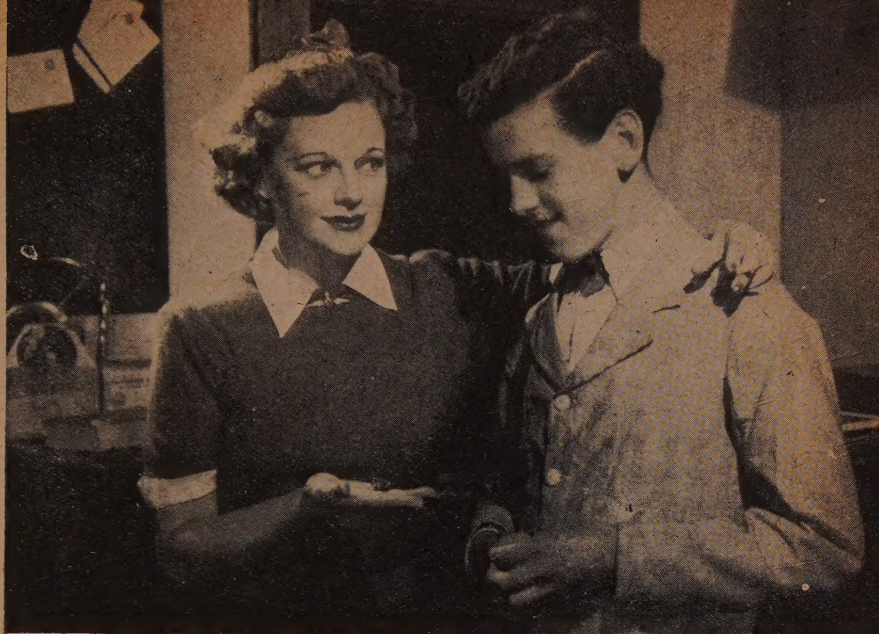
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John Vickers.

Percy: What about Bele now, eh?

Doris: Of course, Percy, it was Bele.

Countess Doris Skriczevinsky (Adrianne Allen), overjoyed at the safe return of her pilot husband, missing in a raid, agrees with Percy, the hotel pot boy (George Cole), that his lucky charm, Bele, did the trick. A scene from Terence Rattigan's successful play about the R.A.F. which has been running for over six months at the Apollo.



John Vickers.

Fanny: Very well. I ask your pardon. Go on!

Emlyn William's production of Lillian Hellman's moving play is nearing its anniversary performance at the Aldwych. The scene shows Athene Seyler as Fanny Farrelly and Norris Smith as Joseph, the Farrellys' coloured servant.

AMATEUR STAGE

Notes and Topics

A QUERY raised last month as to the post-war tastes of amateur operatic societies brought a number of comments from readers, some of whom asked for the views of people in London qualified to speak. Obviously, by this is meant the holders of rights in popular plays for amateurs. Here, then, is Mr. F. E. H. Carter, of His Majesty's Theatre, London, speaking in February on the subject. His company own the rights of many of the older works, and some newer pieces.

"I do think," said Mr. Carter, "that peace will bring a resumption of the vast amount of amateur stage work prevalent before the war. But we must be prepared for a time lag. I think after this war the demobilisation period will be more extended than last time. Young men in the forces will be required for armies of occupation or police forces, so they will not be available for amateur groups so quickly as the women.

"But it is undoubtedly an excellent thing that this amateur stage work should revive—it is all to the good of public interest in the theatre. What amateurs' post-war tastes in musical works will be can be gauged from two or three facts. First, very few of the new professional musicals are suitable for amateurs—they are personality vehicles for star players, not the all-round, full chorus works which amateur societies prefer. Can you think of half a

dozen new musicals that are suitable? We have *Balalaika* (a professional revival of which is under consideration) and there is a possibility with *Waltz Without End*. It is difficult to name more.

"THE second fact is equally important. There is ample evidence that the public are interested in these older musicals, as witness the number of professional revivals of them. *Desert Song*, *Belle of New York*, *Merry Widow*, *The Quaker Girl*, *Duchess of Dantzic*, *No, No, Nanette*, and others have been or are being revived, with good public response. Does not this prove a welcome for them from amateurs after the war? They will not go far wrong to give them again to their local audiences."

Mr. Carter had some interesting things to say on provincial theatre audiences in war-time.

"Contrasted with the cinema, theatre going for so many people has been an event, not a habit. But theatre business in the provinces during this war has been so good that one may hope that a change is taking place, which will be to the permanent benefit of the living stage. But let us face our facts squarely.

"FIRST reason for the improved touring business is the prevalence of money—all ranks of workers have more to spend, despite taxation. Next there are the restrictions on competitive entertainment and relaxation. Travel is difficult and not encouraged. Dog races and similar events are cut down. Pleasure motoring is out for the duration. Black-out conditions demand indoor entertainment. Add all such factors, and do they not mean that the provincial theatre is having a lucky break?

"We have been fortunate in retaining a fair proportion of our artistes, who give a percentage of their time to forces entertainment. This, and the financial conditions, have enabled touring companies to do well in many towns previously unprofitable. The big hope is that this war-time experience will so establish a public demand for the theatre that after the war both professionals and amateurs will benefit."

APROPOS of Mr. Carter's comments on the popularity of the older musicals, this letter from a reader is an apt commentary. Mr. Donald Ford, of Osterley, writes:—

"In these days when—in London and its suburbs—amateur operatic societies are

(Continued opposite)

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Amateur Stage (Continued)

almost extinct I thought you would be interested in a venture which a friend and I have launched here in Hounslow.

"A few months ago I approached a number of keen amateur operatic 'fans' and founded a society of over fifty members. Many of them were members of societies in the district which had closed down for the duration.

"Rehearsals have afforded them a well-earned relief from the difficulties of the times, and we proposed to put on Lionel Monckton's ever popular *A Country Girl* at a local hall in aid of the Red Cross Society.

"Before our final arrangements were made the society came to the attention of organisers of Twickenham's 'Wings for Victory' week, with the result that the show is to be put on at the Richmond Theatre for the week of March 8-13, with a matinée on the Saturday.

"Mr. Albert Farrant is producing, and I am the musical director. It is hoped that seven full houses will yield a useful gift for the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund. We dubbed ourselves 'The War-time Players,' and hope soon to change to 'The Post-War Players.'"

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